

A Comparative Approach to the Problem of Evil from a Theological and Philosophical Perspective*

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ABSTRACT

The problem of evil is the common problem of both philosophy and theology. Philosophers and kalām scholars have developed a theodicy/defense of divine justice that is in keeping with their understanding of religion, paradigms and methodologies. They have tried to explain and make sense of the evil in the world in accordance with their theories of creation. For this reason, both sides show serious differences in both metaphysical and moral evil. Philosophers have drifted away from rational thought on the topic of metaphysical evil as they have stuck to emanation theory based on fictional assumptions, yet have taken an exceptionally rational path towards moral evil. Kalām scholars, on the other hand, have never been able to disentangle themselves from turning both the matter of natural and moral evil into a metaphysical problem. The truth is that this problem will be more resolvable when it is evaluated together with the laws of universe, testing process and the belief of hereafter. In order to be able to see their point of departure and rational basis in this subject, we have tried to present this article in a comparative manner with the main lines.

KEYWORDS

Kalām, Philosophy, Theology, The Problem of evil, Rationality, Moral and Metaphysical Evil.

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Kötülük Problemine Felsefi ve Kelâmî Açıdan Mukayeseli Bir Yaklaşım

ÖZ

Kötülük meselesi, hem felsefenin hem de teolojinin ortak problemidir. Filozoflar ve teologlar bu konuda kendi din anlayışlarına, paradigmalarına ve metodolojilerine uygun bir teodise / ilahi adalet savunusu geliştirmişlerdir. Onlar dünyadaki kötülük olgusunu kendi yaratılış teorilerine uygun olarak izah etmeye ve anlamlandırmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu nedenle her iki taraf da hem metafizik hem de ahlaki kötülük konusunda ciddi ayrılıklar göstermektedirler. Filozoflar, tabii kötülük konusunda, kurgusal varsayımlara dayalı sudur nazariyesine bağlı kaldıklarından rasyonellikten uzaklaşmış; ancak ahlaki kötülükler konusunda son derece rasyonel bir yol izlemişlerdir. Buna karşılık kelimacılar ise hem tabii hem de ahlaki kötülük konusunu metafiziksel bir sorun haline dönüştürmekten kurtulamamışlardır. Hakikat şu ki bu sorun, evrende işleyen yasalar, imtihan süreci ve ahiret inancı ile birlikte değerlendirildiğinde daha makul bir çözüm imkânına kavuşacaktır. Söz konusu ayrılık noktalarını ve onların rasyonel temellerini görebilmek için, bu makalemizde konuyu ana hatlarıyla mukayeseli bir şekilde sunmaya çalıştık.

ANAHTAR KELİMELELER

Kelâm, Felsefe, Teoloji, Kötülük Problemi, Rasyonel, Ahlakî ve Metafizik Kötülük.

INTRODUCTION

The good and evil are a quality of actions. Whether the actions acquire good or evil character by themselves or due to their doers' purpose and to the results they bring about is an arguable matter. In a relative manner, the action that provides benefit for its subject is characterized as good, while the ones that bring harm are qualified as evil. By his nature, human chooses what is useful for him and avoids the harmful ones. Therefore, he describes what he prefers as good and what he avoids as evil. However, these judgements about actions do not mean that they actually carry the value of good or evil. In some cases, the actions identified as good might be bad or the ones characterized as evil may be good. The foregoing fact brings forth the problem of objective identification of the good and evil.

1. DEFINITION OF THE GOOD AND EVIL

1.1. The Good and Evil from a Philosophical Perspective

Philosophers' definitions of the good and evil are closely related to their understanding of existence. According to Islamic thinkers, on top of the existential hierarchy is Absolute Being. It requires nothing in its presence since its existence is by itself. The reason for the existence of other beings is its cognition of itself. Since it knows its own entity, all beings have known how to get extracted out of it in an absolute and perfect order and the universe has existed as an inevitable consequence of its cognition.¹ In Ibn Sînâ (Avicenna)'s ontology, the array from the highest level to the lowest of the livings derived from Absolute Being

¹ Ibn Sînâ, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, trans. Ekrem Demirli - Osman Türker (Istanbul: Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2011348; al-Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, trans. Ömer Türker (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu, 2015), 3: 308; Muḥammād b. A'ḷā Tahānāwī, *Kashshaf istilāhāt al-funūn* (Beirut: s.n., nd.), 3:1235.

with a certain coordination and order is explained in a tremendously systematic manner.² Yet in this article, we have had to suffice with discussing only a part of the subject concerning the definition of evil.

Seeing that the reason for existence is the Absolute Being's cognition of itself and hence the derivation of all beings from it in a complete and perfect order, it can be clearly seen that the principal significance of existence is the appearance of said completeness and perfection. The aspects regarded as evil are thus considered among the elements enabling this completeness and perfection. According to this thinking, since the knowledge of Allah encompasses what is complete and perfect, an order of object more perfect than that is unthinkable. This point of view has necessitated the definition of evil through concept of existence. Therefore, from the philosopher's point of view, evil is divided into two parts as essential evil and accidental evil: Essential evil is the absence of one of the fixed quality object inherently possesses, whereas accidental evil emerges depending on an external reason that hinders the quality of object. Thus, it should be regarded according to them, as the absence of an existing quality or a quality likely to exist. Consequently, absolute absence signifies nothing from their perspective.³

In this context, for instance, weakness is due to the absence of strength which is a quality; while freedom is due to the absence of health, another quality. Hence both are qualified as evil. As seen, we do not speak ontologically of an unalterable existence such as strength or health, but the absence. This is the motive of how evil is ontologically considered nothing more than a plurality with regard to philosophy.

1.2. The Good and Evil from a Theological Perspective

To eliminate the inconveniences resulting from relative definition of the good and evil, Mu'tazila separated the concepts of khayr (good) and shar (evil) from pretty and ugly, defining the good and evil along with pretty and ugly. As they realized that an action, on top of its intrinsic beauty, may not be beneficial for its doer, even may harm him/her, they took the action itself as a basis in definition of the good and evil along with drawing attention to the doer's goal in doing the action.⁴ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār defines the good and bad as: "The good is profit that is pretty, the status of all actions in Allah's land of offering is as this, whereas the evil is harm that is ugly. Allah is excluded of (beyond) committing the evil that is ugly."⁵

The attention-grabbing point in these definitions is that the benefit in the definition of good is qualified as pretty and harm in the definition of evil is qualified as ugly. By these characterizations, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār presents the exact essential definition of good and evil. In logic, exact essential definition is based on the close distinction of a thing from its close genus as in "Human is a speaking organism". In this definition, animal is a close genus to human, human is the genus defined, while "talking" is the distinction.⁶ In Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's definition of evil, evil is the genus defined, harm is its close genus and ugly is the close

² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 307.

³ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 349-356.

⁴ Muhammad as-Sayyid al-Julaynid, *Qaḍiyyat al-khayr wa al-sharr fī al-fikr al-Islāmī: uṣūluḥā al-naẓariyya, jawānibuhā al-taṭbīqiyya, dirāsa 'ilmiyya li mas'ūliyyat al-insān fī al-Islām* (Cidde: s.n., 1981), 28.

⁵ Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, "*al-Mukhtaṣar fī uṣūl al-dīn*", *Rasā'il al-'adl wa-l-tawḥīd*, edited by Muḥammad 'Imāra (Cairo: s.n., 1971), 1: 211.

⁶ İbrahim Emiroğlu, *Ana Hatlarıyla Klasik Mantık* (İstanbul: s.n., 1999): 92-93.

distinction.⁷ According to Mu‘tazila, unlike good and evil and benefit and harm, beauty and ugliness are not qualities assigned to action, upon external factors but qualities contained in action itself. That is to say, from their view, an action is qualified as pretty or ugly as to a number of features contained in itself. To exemplify, let’s examine the action of unjust killing. The action is not ontologically different from murder committed with another motive for the reason that both actions eventually include ending someone’s life. Nevertheless, what make the action of unjust killing evil yet the action of killing an enemy when defending your motherland good are qualities that are added on ontological realities of both actions. Every action that carries these qualities will naturally take the same characterization. What causes the action of unjust killing to be denominated as evil is its being cruel. Mu‘tazila names this phenomenon as the direction that renders action ugly (wajh al-qubḥ /the direction of ugliness). According to them, a further thinking and examination is required for this direction to be known.⁸

When we consider what we have described above, we can see that, according to Mu‘tazila, there are two basic conditions for understanding whether an action is ugly/evil. The first one is to know the direction that makes action ugly. For instance, as for the action of unfair killing, the direction is that it has the quality of being unjust. The second is to make an additional thinking and investigation to determine whether this direction is actually contained in the action or not. Again examining the action of unfair murder, it is important in this context to ascertain that it is committed without any motive behind and that it is unjust. In the opinion of Mu‘tazila, since mind is competent in all of these stages, it not only determines the good and evil independently of revelation, but also can oblige to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. In fact, in Muslim thought, the first person to mention this matter was Jahm,⁹ founder of Jahmiyya and later Mu‘tazila improved his view.

Māturīdites, despite being in the same line with Mu‘tazila about cognizance and determination of the good and evil, dissent from their argument suggesting reason has authority to order the pursuance of good and to forbid the evil.¹⁰ Ash‘arites, however, think completely different on this subject from them. Although they are in accord with the others on definition of the good and evil in relative and aesthetic sense,¹¹ they totally diverge about the good and evil from the view of religion and morals. According to Ash‘arites, the good and evil can only be determined by divine will. From their view, determination of the good and evil by a criterion other than divine will means the latter is kept within bounds of this criterion. However, divine

⁷ Julaynid, *Qaḍīyyat*, 28.

⁸ Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *al-Muḥīṭ bi-l- taklīf*, edited by Sayyid al-Azmī (Egypt: s.n., nd.), 235; Samih Dughaym, *Falsafat al-qadar fī fikr al-Mu‘tazila* (Beirut: s.n., 1985), 282. For detailed information see. Metin Özdemir, *İslam Düşüncesinde Kötülük Problemi* (Istanbul: s.n., 2014), 311-320.

⁹ Abu’l-Fath Abd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *al-Milel wa al-niḥal*, edited by Muhammad Sayyid Ghaylānī (Beirut: s.n., ts.), 1:88

¹⁰ Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitābu’t-Tevhid Tercümesi*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2002), 127-128.

¹¹ Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 3:312.

will is absolute, and something absolute cannot be restricted by anything.¹² In this respect, Ash‘arites make the definition of the good and evil as: “What requires praise in this world and good deed in hereafter is good, what requires scorn in this world and punishment in hereafter is evil.”¹³

As a conclusion, kalām scholars in general, have two different viewpoints in definition of the good and evil. For Mu‘tazila and Māturīdites good and evil are qualities that can be determined through reason and objective criteria. Therefore, the benefit that is pretty is good and the harm that is ugly is evil. From their perspective, the praise and scorn are only applicable to this kind of actions. Ash‘arites, on the other hand, predicate this matter on compliance with divine will. They say no judgement of reason is valid before the word of Allah, because in their view, giving any role to the reason on this sort of matters signifies the limitation of the divine will to boundaries of the reason. According to their understanding of denial of likeness and similitude, nothing that implies deficiency in epithets of Allah is acceptable. The reason why Asharite view comes to a dead end on this issue is that they do not include wisdom in their conception of denial. No doubt that the reason and experience clearly manifest the good and evil to have been known even before having been defined by Allah.

2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL REASON AND WISDOM BEHIND THE EVIL’S INCLUSION IN THE DIVINE DECREE

Under this title, we will try to cover primarily the reasons and wisdoms behind metaphysical and natural evil deeds which stem from flaws and defects in creation and then we will seek to elucidate why moral misdeeds are allowed.

2.1. The Reason and Wisdom behind the Inclusion of Natural Evil in the Divine Decree

The main question in this context is: “Why Allah the Omnipotent, who is vested with all titles of perfection, does not will goodness to prevail over entire existence, hindering all that is evil?”

Before proceeding to the details of philosophical responses to this question, it will be useful to outline Muslim philosophers’ approach to the divine decree. In this regard, Al-Fārābī says: “The providence of Allah has embraced all beings and reached everyone. Everything that happens is due to His divine fate and destiny. Evil deeds are also come from His divine fate and destiny, as evil that object is supposed to possess are relative, and evil about inferior realm. They accidentally have some benefits, because if evil did not exist, the good would not be much and perpetual. If a great good is abandoned while only a spot of evil is avoided, it would cause the evil to rise.”¹⁴ We can say that this meaning assigned to divine decree is widely relevant for Muslim philosophers as well. For instance, when examining what Avicenna says about the reason and wisdom behind evil, we can see that almost the same expressions are used.¹⁵

¹² Sa‘d-al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid: Maqāṣid fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, edited by Abd al-Rahman Umayya. Beirut: s.n.,1989), 3:288.

¹³ Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 3:312.

¹⁴ Mahmut Kaya, *Felsefe Metinleri* (Istanbul: s.n., 2003), 128.

¹⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 348 vd.

If we return to the question above, we must say above all that this issue is directly related to philosophers' postulation of the divine providence as was also mentioned in philosophical definition of evil. Simply expressed, Allah, the absolute existence, is at the top of the existential hierarchy. Therefore, he is in need of nothing in his existence, which demonstrates that he possesses all attributes of divine perfection. Thus, not a single inability can be thought in himself. All of his attributes are absolute and illimitable.¹⁶ In this sense, it is not philosophically possible to directly ascribe any inadequacy to the Absolute Being, who is flawless. So where does evil stem from?

The raison of all that exists is Absolute Being's cognizance of Himself who surrounds the knowledge of possibly the most perfect order of everything. By virtue of this knowledge, he has consented that all benevolence and the order of blessing emanate from him in a most absolute way possible. Hence, every existence has flown out of him in a flawless order in compliance with His consent. This is what divine providence means to Islamic thinkers.¹⁷

When we follow the ontologically hierarchical order of this effusion, we can see that the first the Universal Intellect, Universal Soul and other celestial beings came to existence. No evil is present in this very part of the universe. Thus, pure goodness prevails over the latter. Evil could not find a way to infiltrate into it, for the reason that said universe does not accept evil by its nature. However, when it comes to sublunary realm, the foregoing fact becomes different. Evil has found a chance to appear in sublunary realm due to the fact that it is composed of a material which welcomes form and nothingness. The essential point in this context is that the existence of a material that could function as material without accepting form and nothingness and would not necessitate the material itself is unthinkable. Flame, for example, cannot be created without its feature of burning. If so, we would have to speak of something else other than fire. Thus, a relation should be established between what is burnt-what is heated and what burns-what heats to achieve perfection in the existence of fire. In this web of relations, the initial aim in creation is the provision of benefits some beings require. For instance, in that case, flame would cause beings, which need to be burnt and warmed, to be burnt and warmed. Yet it may also lead to some disasters such as combustion of an innocent person's organ. However, this kind of misfortunes produced by flame's feature of burning is relatively few when compared to benefits it provides.¹⁸ When nature is observed from this perspective, it can be clearly seen that the mostly dominant situation is the actualization of the goodness that is aimed. Then, we cannot say that all units of a species are in danger seeing a number of harms emerging alongside intended benefit. If we look again into flame example, a great majority of individuals of human species, which is under Animalia kingdom, obtain huge benefits off flame's character of burning and heating. Of course, some of its units might get harmed. Total prevention of this harm hinges on non-existence of the flame, which brings about lots of good and right that are aimed by virtue of its ability to burn and heat. If the foregoing case happened, a large number of good would be hindered owing to a few evil.¹⁹ Consequently, in the notion of providence of philosophers like Avicenna, this kind of approaches is found contrary to divine wisdom,

¹⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 291, 348.

¹⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 348.

¹⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 350-351.

¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 351-355.

because this requires the materialization of potential good and right. The existence of evil is therefore indispensable for fulfillment of potential good and right in sublunary realm. This indispensability does not arise from a deficiency in divine providence, quite the contrary, it is rooted in interactions contained in the web of relations lying in it.²⁰

This line of reasoning can be explained with another example as: The power of fury triggers the desire of superiority. Hence a person with anger becomes happy as long as he/she meets this desire of him/her. Yet sometimes, this power is likely to incite cruelty. In that case, he/she becomes evil in comparison with who is wronged. Nonetheless, human might get competent by hindering they desire to be superior, which stems from the negative impact of the power of reason and anger. In this case, produced by the power of anger, the desire of superiority again becomes evil compared to this preventive action. The result deduced from this is that each action actually qualified as evil is a competence in comparison with the motive behind the action. For example, the desire to surpass is a competence when compared to what produces it, the power of anger. Therefore, this sort of actions is regarded as evil when compared to respondents they affect or to a better action that holds them back.²¹

The evil adhered to substance can occasionally be caused by external sources as is in the case where a defect emerges at the creation of some living beings. For instance, when the substance that is active during the generation of human or horse is not able to accomplish its ability due to an external factor, a number of flaws and defects might occur during birth. This phenomenon is not provoked by actor reason which grants ability to sperm, but caused by the fact that the substance, which is in the passive position, is not able to accept its aforementioned ability thanks to an external factor. Hindering the ability of sperm, these external factors, aside from being harmful in some instances as we saw in flame example, are beneficial in many other cases. Therefore, we cannot desire these external factors to disappear completely. For the reason that preventing numerous benefits that occur all the time to avoid the risk of a sporadically emerging harm is not consistent with the wisdom.²²

Having grounded their thoughts on this point, philosophers such as Al-Fārābī and Avicenna do not hold with the pessimistic view that evil is larger than the good. For them, this view contradicts both experience and divine providence, the source of existence. Therefore, from Muslim philosopher's point of view, preventing much good from happening lest little evil would occur is the greatest evil.²³

Avicenna expounds this notion as: “[With regard to good-evil relationship], in phenomena and events these [five] cases come to question: What you design to exist are either what are absolute evil, what are not likely to be evil or deficient or those when happen the good would predominate, whose different occurrence contradicts its own nature or what are dominated by evil or existences where two cases are leveled. Existence without evil in it is not present in nature. There is no type of existence either, where all is evil or evil

²⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *Risaleler*, translated by Alparslan Açıkgenç - Hayri Kırbaçoğlu (Ankara: s.n., 2004), 61.

²¹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 352-353.

²² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 350; Kaya, *Felsefe Metinleri*, 300.

²³ Ibn Sīnā, *Risaleler*, 61-62; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā*, 352.

prevails or where the good and evil are leveled. The thing in whose existence the good is dominant, however, must exist when the good prevails."²⁴

Briefly stated, according to the philosophical point of view we have outlined above, evil is rooted in the contrast between the opposite elements playing a part in the interaction of the doer, the action and what is acted against, which contribute to the fulfillment of divine providence, the source of a common good and right. Even though sometimes damages spring from the confrontation of two opposite elements with burnable and burning natures, the principal intention in their creation is aspired common good and rights. Thusly, emerging harms do not depend upon the principal intention, but upon the secondary intention as inevitable consequences of abilities created for the fulfillment of the principal intention's goals and targets. This secondary intention is not something directly aimed at, on the contrary, is an indirect consequence that emerges inevitably for the fulfillment of the principal intention.

2.2. The Reason and Wisdom behind the Inclusion of the Moral Evil in Divine Decree

When philosophers dwelled on morals, they did something different than kalām scholars and considered the relationship between philosophy and morals. However, the most important problems in terms of morality for them are human freedom and determination of moral values. So we will briefly address these last two points under this heading because of their direct relevance to our subject.

2.2.1. Determination of Good and Evil

Philosophers based on the happiness of man while trying to determine the good and the evil. For example, according to Al-Fārābī, happiness is purely good. The reason he saw happiness as purely good is that he thought of happiness as the ultimate competence that man can attain. When one reaches happiness, he/she is freed from material dependence and reaches ultimate peace.²⁵ That's why Al-Fārābī describes the city where people do not know what happiness is and do not even think about it as the City of Ignorance.²⁶ Hence for him, all means that lead to happiness are good, and every element that hinders is bad. But the goodness or the badness of these means and elements are not because of their essence, but because they cause happiness or hinder it.²⁷

Al-Fārābī believes that through the power of thought, people can comprehend all the elements that can assist them or obstruct them on their pursuit of happiness. According to him, objects are discovered by the power of thought to help achieve an aim and a will. The one who makes an invention must first take the goal into account. Then decide on the tools that can be used to reach this goal. Al-Fārābī believes that there is a prime point to all human experience. According to him, the prime point for the power of thought is when one discovers the most useful tool to achieve their goals. Surely, the goals could be good, they could also be bad. Or it could be believed that they can only be good. That is the point that creates a red line where good and bad can be distinguished. If the discovered tools are the most useful things for a virtuous purpose,

²⁴ Kaya, *Felsefe Metinleri*, 304.

²⁵ Abū Nasr al-Fārābī, *Farabî'nin Üç Eseri*, trans. Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: s.n.,1974), 45.

²⁶ Abū Nasr al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna al-fādila*, trans. Nafiz Danışman (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2011), 98.

²⁷ Fārābī, *al-Madīna al-fādila*, 60, 70

they are good. If the goals are bad, the tools which are discovered to achieve this goal through the power of thought are also bad, vulgar and evil. If the goals are believed to be good, the useful tools to achieve the goals are also believed to be good.²⁸

2.2.2. The Theoretical Foundation of Moral Evil

Muslim philosophers have mostly followed the Platonist tradition in their theories of moral virtues. Their theories on moral virtues are based on the balanced and measured use of person's natural endowments. Therefore, for them the main source of moral evil is the immeasurable and unbalanced use of these natural endowments.

According to Ibn Miskawayh, there are three natural endowments of the human soul, which are the power of thought or mental power, sensual or animal power and anger or lion power. From these, the mental power is located in the brain, the animal power is located in the liver and the anger is located in the heart. All of them have both virtue and disgrace. The emergence of moral virtue depends on a balanced and measured use of all three of them. But in these three endowments, the mental power is the captain. Therefore, the fact that the other two endowments are balanced and measured depends on the guidance of a balanced and measured mind. When the power of thought becomes balanced and tries to reach the knowledge of the truth, its virtuous knowledge or wisdom emerges. In this respect, immoderacy and instability in the power of thought cause ignorance which is the opposite of knowledge and wisdom. When sensual power becomes balanced and measured with the direction of mind, its virtuous decency and generosity arise. Otherwise, indecency becomes the subject, which means not being able to take oneself away from the shameful evils. Finally, when the anger power is subject to the direction of mind, its virtuous self-restraint and valiance take place. An anger power out of control of the mind causes cowardice or cruelty. With the measured and balanced use of these three virtues, the virtue of justice ensues.²⁹

The Muslim philosophers who have acted on the theoretical ground, for which we drew the frame above, counted wisdom, decency, valiance and justice as the most important virtues. Therefore, the opposite of them, ignorance, indecency, cowardice and cruelty are the greatest disgusts and evils. All other virtues of mankind are a part of these four virtues. For example, sharp understanding and learning ability is a part of wisdom, virtues such as shame, patience, docility and good temperance are a part of decency, virtues like generosity, courage and nobility are a part of valiance, virtues like equity, friendship, habituation and piety are a part of justice.³⁰

According to Ibn Miskawayh, by its nature, person's virtue is to compliment the wisdom and knowledge and to avoid materialist actions. But for the soul to act according to its nature, one must ask for this virtue. The virtue of man is as big as the desire for the soul's merit. So, if a person takes care to act according to his or her virtue to the extent he/she is able to handle and to avoid actions that would prevent it, he will be virtuous. In this context, the first thing a person has to do is to purify his soul from the disadvantages that are in opposition to his virtue. Ibn Miskawayh describes these disgraces generally as low

²⁸ Fārābī, *Farabî'nin Üç Eseri*, 27-28.

²⁹ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzib al-akhlāq*, edited by Ibn al-Khatib (Cairo: s.n., 1398), 23-37; Macit Fahri, *İslam Felsefesi Tarihi* (Istanbul: s.n.,1987), 151-152; M.M. Sharif, *İslam Düşüncesi Tarihi* (Istanbul: s.n.,1990), 2:95.

³⁰ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzib al-akhlāq*, 23-73; Fahri, *İslam Felsefesi Tarihi*,152.

bodily lusts and ugly animalistic desires. At this point, by coming near Mu‘tazila, he says that if one knows and recognizes these disgraces, one will try to avoid from doing them and from being mentioned with them. Yet if one thinks them to be virtuous, they will not give up and will make them traditions. In this respect, humans get away from the virtues and contaminate their souls with these disgraces that they see as virtues.³¹

Thinkers who composed the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* (Treatises of the Brethren of Purity) tend to reduce people's differences in moral attitudes and behaviors into biological factors. According to them, “warm-tempered (mahrut) people, especially those who have the heart structure of a warm-tempered person, are usually brave, generous, mindless in fearful situations, low on determination and attention, quick-tempered, but easily calmed, smart and astute and imaginatively powerful people.”

Cold-tempered (mebrūd) ones are usually foolish, vulgar in nature, minger and morally immature people.

Those who are moist and calm (mertüb) are usually not intelligent, not persevering to their jobs, mute, tolerant, moral, irresponsible in natural matters, easy to persuade and quickly forgetting.

Those who are dry (yābis) are patient in their jobs, hard-minded and hard to persuade. With these people, feelings like patience, hatred, stinginess, conservatism and protection are overwhelming.³²

Al-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' presents the way to reach moral maturity with a text they claim to be one of the books of Israelites as: “If dryness takes one and drifts them to extremism, one's tenacity turns to roughness and rudeness. If moisture takes one and directs them, one's tenacity turns to intimidation and suffering, if heat directs one, one turns to anger, contradiction and vulgarity; if coldness directs one, one turns to distraction and foolishness.”³³

Al-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' believes that the equilibrium in these mixtures may vary depending on the geographical characteristics of the people, the education they have received since childhood and the beliefs they hold.³⁴

As seen, moral virtues or disgraces, according to Al-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' , arise from the extremism or balance in biological mixtures in human nature. According to Muslim philosophers, it depends on whether the psychological factors are used balanced way and prudently.

Briefly, according to Muslim philosophers, the basis of the moral virtue is to act according to the wisdom that is born through the measured use of mind because man can achieve all its virtues only through the wisdom that is acquired this way, with the prudent and balanced use of all the natural endowments. That's why a person should pay great attention to purifying the soul from the disgraces that keep them away from virtues and should be very willing to do so. Therefore, according to them, the source of moral evil is not to be willing to stay away from the disgraceful obstacles that keep one away from the noble virtues.

³¹ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-akhlāq*, 18.

³² *İhvân-ı Safâ Risâleleri*, edited by Abdullah Kahraman (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Publications, 2012), 1:205.

³³ *İhvân-ı Safâ Risâleleri*, 1:206.

³⁴ *İhvân-ı Safâ Risâleleri*, 1:207-212

3. THE REASON AND WISDOM BEHIND EVIL’S INCLUSION IN THE DIVINE DECREE FROM A KALĀMĪ/THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Even though the visions of the philosophers and kalām scholars on moral evil concur, their opinions about natural evil have diverged as their understanding of Allah and realm has been different. While the philosophers have approached the problem of evil through theories of creation, kalām scholars have discussed it over the reason and wisdom of the creation of universe.

3.1. The Reason and Wisdom behind the Inclusion of Natural Evil in the Divine Decree

This subject is directly related to kalām scholars’ understanding of predestination and fate. Whereas the word “al-qaḍā’ (predestination)” lexically means “edict”, conceptually, it refers to universal divine judgements about “the objects of universe” (a’yān al-mawjudat/the essence of all beings), handed down in accordance with circumstances that eternally exist.³⁵ The word “al-qadar (fate)” however, is “the relation between divine will and idiosyncratic time of the object”. Fate is therefore the connection of each quality of object to a certain time and reason. In other words, it represents the gradual rising up of possible beings from nonentity to the area of existence in compliance with predestination. Thus both fate and predestination refer to the judgements’ passage to the existence when the conditions become suitable in the realm of objects, former in pre-eternity, latter in the ongoing time.³⁶ Even though Māturīdītes name what Ash‘arites call predestination as fate or vice versa, they agree upon the meaning content.³⁷

These definitions, for the most part, come from kalām scholars’ fundamental understanding towards Allah’s title of wisdom. Embracing the idea that the knowledge of Allah encompasses everything that eternally exists, kalām scholars have had to comply with the argument that predestination and fate come to pass pursuant to this wisdom; yet in details, some notable disagreements come in sight. Mu‘tazila,³⁸ who are of the same opinion with Ahl al-Sunnah (the people of the Sunnah) on divine knowledge, totally disagree with them on the argument suggesting the actions to be created to solve human’s problem of freedom.

When examining the definitions of predestination and fate by kalām scholars, they are understood to consider everything that occurs in universe as part of the divine will. The main issue in this frame is whether the happenings which we count as evil such as various disasters, calamities or natural catastrophes would also be considered evil in terms of divine actions. Since the phenomenon of natural evil is a subject directly related to Allah’s titles of wise, willed and potent, it should be evaluated within the frame of divine actions. Divine deeds are treated as the justice of Allah by Mu‘tazila, as his will by Ash‘arites, while identified as his wisdom by Māturīdītes. Allah, according to Mu‘tazila, only does what is just and good, to Ash‘arites, whatever He wants and for Māturīdītes, He does nothing but wise things.

³⁵ al-Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb at-Ta‘rīfāt*, edited by Abd al-Munīm al-Hafnī (s. l: Dār al-Rushd, 1991), 200; Özdemir, *İslam Düşüncesinde Kötülük Problemi*, 145.

³⁶ Jurjānī, *Kitāb at-Ta‘rīfāt*, 196; Id, *al-Sayyid Sharīf. Sharh al-Mawāqif* 3:308; Tahānāwī, Muhammad b. A‘lā. *Kashshaf*, 3:134.

³⁷ Özdemir, *İslam Düşüncesinde Kötülük Problemi*, 145-146.

³⁸ Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *Sharh al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, trans. İlyas Çelebi (İstanbul: s.n., 2013), 1:258.

As a matter of fact, all Muslims have agreed on that there is no disorder, imbalance or flaw in the creation, which is one of the results of their general acceptance of the view that all the titles of Allah are good, pretty and right. What have been disputed over are the questions whether Allah created the evil or whether He force people to act.

First of all, all kalām scholars are cognizant that evil is a reality. From their perspective, when something has already been perceived by sense organs and experienced, there is no need to seek further evidence about its existence or reality.³⁹

From Mu‘tazila viewpoint, when divine actions are defined, it is necessary to pay regard to whether they are unjust and whether they are illogical concerning their consequences. Allah does not perform anything unjust or irrational. All His actions are therefore good and pretty;⁴⁰ as He performs them either to provide a benefit or eliminate a suffering or to impose a deserved punishment.⁴¹ However, this kind of approach cannot be said to clinch the issue. In fact, the questions of “what sort of benefit is in the suffering and anguish the children, animals or innocent people live through, what harm this situation eradicates or what misdeed of children it corresponds to” have not yet been satisfactorily answered. Mu‘tazila tries to solve the foregoing issue over the belief that, in hereafter, everyone is going to be thoroughly repaid in exchange for miseries and sufferings they will have undergone in this world. Such situations are similar to the fact that we force our children to learn so that they would benefit from that education or that a worker forces himself to work in return for certain payment. In brief, the income acquired as a result of such situations justifies the existence of suffered miseries and sorrows.⁴²

About natural misdeeds, Mu‘tazila have sought to present a proper solution to the understanding of justice suggesting that Allah in no case would create what is evil and ugly; on the contrary, He always creates what is good and pretty,⁴³ trying to find a reasonable justification for all the matters seemingly considered as ugly and evil such as sufferings and torments. The essential concept they appeal to while producing latter justification is the divine wisdom. What is ugly to us is eventually a good existence created by the divine wisdom. In fact, Mu‘tazila, with reference to the Qur'anic verse “Had Allah willed, He would have made you an ‘ummah’ (one Muslim community)” (al-Maide 5/48), says that Allah can guide all people into true path and make them a single ummah whenever He wants; yet the flawless wisdom does not necessitate such action”.⁴⁴ So according to them, human has no reason to object to the phenomena which are brought by Allah’s unreachable wisdom, such as existence of penury and grief.⁴⁵

³⁹ Māturidī, *Kitābu’t-Tevhid Tercümesi*, 10; Abū Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-‘ad*, edited by Ahmad Fuād al-Ahvānī (Egypt: s.n., 1962), 13:229-230.

⁴⁰ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 13:278.

⁴¹ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 13:218, 335, 369

⁴² Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 13:388.

⁴³ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharh al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, 8.

⁴⁴ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muḥīṭ*, 273-283.

⁴⁵ Özdemir, *İslam Düşüncesinde Kötülük Problemi*, 114.

Yahya Ibn Hamza (d. 749/1348), one of the imams of al-Zaydiyya, outlines Mu'tazila's abovementioned understanding which was developed in line with the concept of divine wisdom as: "Allah does not commit what is ugly and does not transgress what is necessary; all of His actions are good. In this sense, Allah's wisdom and justice express the same thing. He therefore shows His wisdom by creating everything in a solid and ordinate manner in conformity with all kinds of usefulness. He furthermore, by knowing the object, holds all of its facts and details within His wisdom. So the word omnipotent in its meaning of absolute, used only to describe Allah, and encapsulates above three senses."⁴⁶

In conclusion, from Mu'tazila point of view, divine wisdom necessitates divine actions to safeguard human's interest, to prefer always what is the most beneficial (aslāḥ)⁴⁷ and to be in absolute prettiness. What make this prettiness in divine actions necessary are humans' doings.⁴⁸ Ash'arites, however, do not seek any human disability while trying to find an answer to this problem. On the contrary, they accentuate divine will grounding it on their distinctive understanding of tanzih (to declare that Allah is beyond any similarity to anything). They embrace the idea that Allah does whatever He wishes. Divine will cannot be restricted by any motive. They hence identify divine justice as "the at-will dispositions by Allah at His own domain".⁴⁹ Consequently, according to Ash'arites, Allah's torments upon human beings are not wrong, but absolute justice for Him. For everything is in Allah's possession. And the fact that He disposes as He wish is mere justice.

When it comes to Māturīdites, they have made an effort to follow a reasonably consistent path on this subject. They have put the wisdom notion in the center of their comprehension of tanzih. Wisdom, in Māturīdī view, means "to find place for something, put everything where they belong to",⁵⁰ which, at the same time, is the definition of justice. According to Māturīdites, as all actions of Allah stems from His eternal wisdom, everything in universe is flawless and in the proper place. The natural events which result in catastrophic disasters should also be considered in this category. Al-Māturīdī studied this matter in the subject "Wisdom of Creating Harmful Things" in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*.⁵¹ Al-Māturīdī interprets the term of wisdom as following: Allah sets forth the difference between the beings in terms of harms and benefits as a proof of that they have an administrator above them who is cognizant of all and who carries out every single thing over a wisdom; and also presents their cohesion as an evidence of His oneness.⁵²

Apart from His wisdom about belief aspect of existence, He has a number of moral and earthly wisdoms as well, which were created to humiliate the tyrants and kings and elevate those who are weak. Thus

⁴⁶ Ahmad Mahmud Subhi, *al-Imām al-Mujtahid Yahya b. Hamza ve āraūhu al-kalāmiyya* (s.l.: Menshūrāt al-Asr al-Hadīs, 1990), 96.

⁴⁷ Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 14:35.

⁴⁸ Abu'l-Fath Abd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *Nihāyāt al-aqdām* (s.l.: Maktabatu al-Saqafa al-Dīniyye, nd.), 400.

⁴⁹ Abu'l-Fath Abd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *al-Milel wa al-niḥal*, edited by Muhammad Sayyid Ghaylānī (Beirut: s.n., ts.), 1:42.

⁵⁰ Māturīdī, *Kitābu't-Tevhid Tercümesi*, 51, 124.

⁵¹ Māturīdī, *Kitābu't-Tevhid Tercümesi*, 137.

⁵² Māturīdī, *Kitābu't-Tevhid Tercümesi*, 138.

they would not sink into pride about the abundance of their men and armies and, after seeing His power to inflict sultans upon one another, would not exceed the limits Allah imposes. Moreover, when the fact that the existence is composed of beneficial and harmful objects is reflected upon, Allah's self-sufficiency and mightiness can be seen clearly because the actions of none but a being with these qualities take place in a way to produce no harm but benefit. Besides, harmful objects have some side benefits whose essence cannot be conceived by humans. For instance, aside from its feature of burning, fire has the potential to sanitize foods. Likewise, beings both may live with water or may die in it. Such are the objects that are bitter or poisonous. They have curative character for some severe diseases. Therefore, every thinking person knows that it is wrong and erroneous to speak of absolute goodness or evil of the things and hence that every object may cause harm or bring benefit.⁵³

Al-Māturīdī strongly criticizes Mu'tazila's vision of "aslāḥ" (the most beneficial). According to former, aslāḥ cannot be parallel to the concept of divine wisdom⁵⁴ since it contrasts with reality. In fact, when we look into everyday life, we witness that many poor and wealthy people are not in behaviors to pass the test which they are subjected to in the context of worshipping Allah. According to al-Māturīdī, this is a clear indication that Allah does not always choose the best (aslāḥ) for his servants. Therefore, such cases cannot be explained by the notion of aslāḥ, but only with concept of wisdom. What makes testing humans under different conditions essential is not their affairs, but the divine wisdom, which knows the insight of happenings. Testing everyone under the same circumstances would be a huge obstacle to both the realization of all moral maturity and the continuance of long-established world order. In a world where everyone is rich, how moral and religious virtues such as patience, cooperation, solidarity and confidence in God could be realized and how would it be possible to find people to be tasked with the provision of basic necessities for the continuation of life?⁵⁵

Notwithstanding that the concept of divine wisdom is clearer and more comprehensible when compared to aslāḥ view, it is a closed conception in some respects. , because the reason does not have the means to encircle all the wisdom behind the divine actions. Therefore, the problem of natural evil could not be elucidated over the concepts such as aslāḥ (better) and hikmah (wisdom), but is solvable by the help of the joint evaluation of laws of universe, Allah's test on human being and belief in afterlife. It is us who the laws of universe bind. As required by the test, everyone has been given different opportunities. It is left to the person's responsibility to utilize these chances. All inequalities and imbalance that occur in this world as an inevitable consequence of us being tested will be compensated in hereafter, all wrongdoers will be duly punished.

3.2. The Problem of Moral Evil

All kalām scholars including Jahm, the founder of Jahmiyya, agree that the people are responsible for their actions. Jahm has never said the opposite. His words describing human to be floating in front of the

⁵³ Māturīdī, *Kitābu't-Tevhid Tercümesi*, s.138-139.

⁵⁴ Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī, *Ta'vilāt al-Qur'ān*, edited by Ahmet Vanlıoğlu (Istanbul: Mizan Publications, 2005), 12:90; 5:43-45; 6:25-26, 30-31, 112-113; 9:104-105; 13:135-136.

⁵⁵ Metin Özdemir, "Māturīdī'nin Kötülük Problemine Yaklaşımı", Māturīdī'nin Düşünce Dünyası, ed. Şaban Ali Düzgün (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2011), 407-408.

wind were not voiced in context of human responsibilities, but to defend the argument that there is no similitude between human and Allah in terms of attributes against the Mujassimites (the Anthropomorphists) and Mushabbihah (The Assimilators).

Nevertheless, kalām scholars have faced three fundamental issues about moral evil.⁵⁶ The first is the problem of the creation of actions; the second is why Allah guides people to the right path or deflect from it and the third is the ascertainment of elemental criterion in determination of the good and evil. Hence, under this heading, we will only be addressing briefly to these three fundamental issues in the context of moral evil.

3.2.1. The Problem of the Creation of Actions

Unlike the philosophers, who regard this as a human problem, kalām scholars have treated this as a metaphysical problem similar to natural evil. Because from their point of view, the principal determinant in problem of moral evil is the notion of tanzih (to declare that Allah is beyond any similarity to anything), the same as it was in problem of natural evil.

According to Ahl al-Sunnah, as the unique creator of everything, He is the one who forms human actions. The oneness of the creator is an unavoidable result of the tawhid (the principle of uniqueness). Thus no one can be endowed with the ability of creating, but Allah.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Mu'tazila, who discuss tawhid in first place among their five essential principles, claim without any hesitation that human is the architect of their own actions.⁵⁸ For them, had the human actions been created by Allah, there would be no such thing as human responsibility; moreover, Allah would be denominated as the creator of evil. However, as expressed above, their principle of justice vindicates the idea that Allah cannot be qualified as the creator of evil. Mu'tazila's view suggesting that human actions are created by Allah, human responsibilities would disappear stems from their consideration of Allah as the true agent of actions.⁵⁹ For Ahl al-Sunnah, however, criterion that determines the true doer of the action is the direction of free will towards that action.⁶⁰

After all, this divine will issue has been a contradictive matter between Ash'arites and Māturīdites. Formers say, the actual motive behind humans held responsible for their actions is because they are the ones who acquire (acquisition [al-kasb]) them. al-Kasb for Ash'arites, is the realization of the action by human's power of hādith (the thing that comes from nonexistence into existence). Yet, this power show itself simultaneously with the action, not before the action. That is, a separate power is created for each action and man hence perform his action via this generated power. Therefore, Allah is the one who, in fact, creates al-kasb according to Ash'arites.⁶¹ So for them, there is no answer to the question "what is the role of human

⁵⁶ Shahrastānī, *al-Milel wa al-nihāl*, 1:86.

⁵⁷ Jurjānī, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, 3:244.

⁵⁸ Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 8:3.

⁵⁹ Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 7:115 vd.

⁶⁰ Ibn al-Humām, *al-Musāyara fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Egypt: s.n., 1317), 1:110-111.

⁶¹ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn*, edited by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: s.n., 1969), 1:339.

in execution process of the actions? Ash'arites have thus been denominated by their antagonists as al-jabr al-mutawassit (relative fatalism).⁶²

Māturīdites, on the other hand, have followed a more liberal path on this subject when compared to Ash'arites. They claim human to have an infinite will created by Allah. When man freely directs this will to a particular object, it turns into particular will, which totally belongs to human. They have tried to overcome the question of who is the creator of this particular will in the context of the principle that Allah is the creator of everything, by the argument that this particular will is only a nominal situation. That is to say, the particular will has no real existence and hence is not actual, but a nominal situation. In other saying, it is not a created object, but a kind of psychological or spiritual state attributed to human. As a matter of fact, while trying to establish rational grounds for human responsibility, Al-Māturīdī underlines that they have the conscious of liberty.⁶³

Contrary to Mu'tazila viewpoint, from Ahl al-Sunnah perspective, the creation of actions by Allah would not entail that He should be identified as the doer of evil. In their way of thinking, Allah does not create the quality of the action but the action itself. The action takes the quality of being good or evil from the servants' kasb or the direction of particular will towards it, not from the fact that Allah creates it. In any case, the real agent of the action is man himself. For Allah predetermines his actions as to his own kasb or particular will. To sum up, what initiates the process of the action's creation by Allah is human's acquisitional or partial will.

The dispute between Ahl al-Sunnah and Mu'tazila in this subject is due to the fact that both parties do not understand one another correctly. The latter mention two sorts of creation, the first of which is the creation out of nothing. The foregoing belongs to Allah completely. The second is that human execute their actions with a power of hadith contained in them. By contrast with Ahl al-Sunnah thought, this power comes before the action. Mu'tazila present the Qur'anic verse "So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (Mu'minūn 23/14) as a proof of these views of them. Ahl al-Sunnah interprets the word "create" mentioned in the verse as "commend".⁶⁴ Yet Mu'tazila uses it to describe the realization of the action by human with a power of hādith (the thing that comes from nonexistence into existence) inside them.⁶⁵

As a result, both Mu'tazila and Ahl al-Sunnah try to solve this issue over metaphysical concerns. About human actions, Mu'tazila's apprehension is the protection of the divine justice, while Ahl al-Sunnah's cause for concern is the vindication of the principle of tawhid. Though when the meanings ascribed to the concept of creation by the former are taken into consideration, they cannot be said to damage the principle of tawhid. As the philosophers treat the problem as a mere moral issue, they are observed to have reached more useful and efficacious results by having focused on the moral principles that would bring man to maturity.

⁶² Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 8:164-165.

⁶³ Ibn al-Humām, *al-Musāyara*, 1:110-111.

⁶⁴ Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Tayyib b. Muhammad al-Bākilānī, *el-Inṣāf*, edited by Imād al-dīn Ahmad Haydar (Beirut: s.n.,1987), 208.

⁶⁵ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 8:163.

3.2.2. The Significance of Allah's Guidance to the Right Path or His Deflection from It

There are verses in Qur'an saying that "Allah guides or misguides whoever He wants to or from the right path". While some of these verses can be interpreted as "Allah sends astray [thereby] whom He wills and guides whom He wills", in some cases this translation is not accurate, as in the verse "That is the guidance of Allah by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom Allah leaves astray - for him there is no guide."⁶⁶

Kalām scholars have resorted to interpreting this sort of verses in the direction of their own understanding of *tanzih* (to declare that Allah is beyond any similarity to anything). According to Ahl al-Sunnah, these expressions signifies that Allah creates guidance or misguidance in the servant's heart in respect to his acquisitional or partial will.⁶⁷ Mu'tazila, on the other hand, explain the verses as, Allah names his servant by the principle of justice as "finding the right path" or "going astray" depending on the actions he does or Allah leaves the servant astray as a punishment or even He guides the servant through the reason and revelations.

In conclusion, kalām scholars have dealt with this problem within a metaphysical frame. When it comes to the philosophers,⁶⁸ however, it is not a metaphysical matter for them but a merely moral issue and occurs in a direct connection with human will.

3.2.3. The Question of What Is the Key Criterion in Determination of the Good and Evil

Whereas the philosophers have covered this subject as a purely mental matter,⁶⁹ kalām scholars have fallen into dispute on it thanks to their different understanding of *tanzih*.

On the subject, Mu'tazila makes inferences convenient with the principle of justice. The reason, for them, had ability to determine the good and evil before religion came on the scene. Religion verifies the reason and helps it on the matters that are out of its scope such as prayers and religious services, because the goodness and evil are not qualities attached to objects from outside, but special attributes contained inside them. For instance, the evil in the action of killing a man undeservedly arises from the quality of injustice and wrong lying in it. This quality is contained in the mentioned action itself. Thus it is not articulated to the action from outside. Therefore, when the reason determines these qualities, it can easily dominate the evil contained in the actions which bear these qualities alone. For this reason, from their perspective, the reason has authority and ability to order what is good and forbid what is evil. Over this way of thinking, Mu'tazila regards the actions that are praised as good while labels others that are condemned as evil.⁷⁰

⁶⁶al-Zumer 39/23.

⁶⁷ Māturīdī, *Ta'vilāt al-Qur'ān*, 6:116; Abu'l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, edited by Cībullah Hasan Ahmad (Egypt: s.n., 1986), 377-378.

⁶⁸ Fārābī, *Farabī'nin Üç Eseri*, 100-101.

⁶⁹ Fārābī, *Farabī'nin Üç Eseri*, 21.

⁷⁰ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muhīt*, 252-253.

For Ash'arites, the determination of the good and evil in the actions which lay responsibilities on human, belongs entirely and directly to the divine will. In this sense, Allah may qualify what seems good to the reason as bad or vice versa. The idea that Allah settles the good and evil as per the reason would mean that His will is restricted by the limits of the mind. Yet in their view, the divine will is an absolute existence and thus impossible to set limits on in any manner. So the authority to both settle the good and evil, and order and forbid them is fairly pertains to Allah.⁷¹ Finally, Māturīdites, agree with Mu'tazila about the determination of the good and evil. Yet they have converged with Ash'arites on designation of good and evil as necessary or illicit.⁷² For all that, all three orders are of the same mind on determination of the good and evil in an aesthetic sense.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In general terms, the phenomenon of evil is a topic that has been assessed in the context of God-universe relation by theist philosophers and kalām scholars. The deniers, however, opt to treat the subject rather as a problem of belief, because in their opinion, the belief of a God ascribed with supreme titles is in the contradiction with the existence of evil.

The deniers' dilemma is rooted in the fact that they discuss the problem of evil only in the context of the high titles attributed to God. But this subject, especially from the theologian perspective, is related to God's aim and intention behind creation as much as to His epithets. According to kalām scholars, Allah created human to test them and hence designed this universe in a way that it would suit with this testing process. He therefore allowed evil to be contained in the process of universe along with the goodness. Of course, had He willed, He could have create a world with no evil in it. However, a world like this would not have been a place inhabited by free beings who would have had chance to realize themselves, display their talents and abilities, on the contrary, it would have been a world where non-skilled beings deprived of will like angels would live. There is no evil in the realm of angels, nor are there human-specific features and opportunities such as creativity and productivity. If Allah had contented Himself only with creating the realm of angels, the perfection and prosperity in creation would not have come to fruition. On the other hand, as only God possesses the power to create something out of nothing, the authority to take decision in this regard belongs only to Him. Thus human's part in this context is to utilize all genuine abilities such as creativity and productivity and hence all the possibilities for the correction and improvement of the earth, standing in awe of His decisions and choices.

Although theist philosopher's and theologian's efforts for the vindication of divine justice are shallowly grounded on this frame, when descended to particulars, significant discrepancies between them manifest themselves. According to Muslim thinkers, who embrace the theory of emanation while grounding the existence, natural evils are not Allah's primary objective. They spring from the deficiencies and flaws that emerge in the nature of the object as a necessary result of ontological hierarchy produced by emanation when descended into sublunary realm. Perfection and competence are at the most excellent degree at the top levels of ontological hierarchy, they are also in Principal Mind which was emanated from Allah in the

⁷¹ Shahristānī, *Nihāyāt al-aqdām*, 371-372.

⁷² Ibn al-Humām, *al-Musāyara*, 1:154, 158.

first place as a necessary result of His cognizance of Himself. When gradually descended downwards however, a decrease is seen in this perfection and competence, which finally becomes clearly apparent in sublunary realm. So natural evil is an accidental and relative phenomenon that arise due to the departure from the principal source. In fact, evil things are very few compared to the goodness. To desire them to completely disappear means to desire many good not to exist as well, because in sublunary realm, thanks to the aforementioned ontological hierarchy, it is not possible to achieve the good without facing any evil. Briefly stated, the evil seen clearly only in sublunary realm are somehow inevitable escorts of the good which are abundant. Consequently, the desire of non-existence of evil despite many good is not reasonable at all, since it would necessitate all good to disappear as well.

Kalām scholars and theologians have adopted the principle of creation out of nothing. Allah for them, is a self-determining creator. The universe is not a direct outcome of His entity, but his absolute will and His limitless power. In this sense, the place of natural evil in universe should be sought within the frame of Allah's goal in creation, which, as pointed out above, is the subjection of human being to a test. Universe was created in accordance with this testing process. Yet kalām scholars have not been able to come together on a single viewpoint in the context of Allah-universe relation. While some of them regard universe to run in connection with the laws of causality as in the case of Mu'tazila and Ahl al-Sunnah scholars, others like Ash'arites, base the continuity of the universe on the action of direct creation which Allah does at all times. The theoretical ground of this creation has been established on their universe concepts based on essence and accident dualism.

When it comes to the moral evil, the philosophers have considered it a pure moral problem. They have thus managed to kept the subject out of being a metaphysical problem by focusing on the abilities human possess during their maturation process. Kalām scholars, on the other hand, have kept regarding this issue as a metaphysical question just as they treat natural evil as a natural consequence of their understanding of tanzih. Mu'tazila, however, unlike other kalām scholars, followed a path proximate to the philosophers with regard to God's being competent and potent in determination of the good and evil and accordingly in designating the actions as necessary and unlawful, and hence managed to develop a natural and instinctive moral approach within the limits of the capacity of human mind. Māturīdītes, aside from joining them in the subject of determination of the good and evil, differed from them about the competence and authority to render something necessary or unlawful.

The philosophers have drifted away from rational thought on the topic of natural evil as they have stuck to emanation theory based on fictional assumptions, yet have taken an exceptionally rational path towards moral evil. Kalām scholars and theologians, on the other hand, have never been able to disentangle themselves from turning both the matter of natural and moral evil into a metaphysical problem. The truth is that this problem will be more resolvable when it is evaluated together with the laws of universe, testing process and the belief of hereafter.

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